

In brief

Virus outbreak hits Uttar Pradesh: The northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh is suffering an outbreak of Japanese encephalitis, which has affected more than 2000 children and killed nearly 600.

China joins global war on smoking: China, the world's largest consumer of tobacco products, has ratified the World Health Organization's framework convention on tobacco control. The Chinese government estimates that 350 million people in the country smoke, 60% of its men and 3% of women.

New South Wales faces autopsy crisis: A shortage of forensic pathologists in New South Wales has created a backlog of almost 900 uncompleted autopsies at the Sydney morgue, and the average waiting time for reports has doubled to six months.

Legionnaires' outbreak in London is investigated: Public health officers are investigating the source of 12 cases of legionnaires' disease in southeast London in July and August. The cases occurred in men aged between 31 and 73. See www.hpa.org.uk/cdr/pages/news.htm#legionella.

Men married to uneducated women have higher risk of cardiac death: Research from Israel published online in the *International Journal of Epidemiology* (doi: 10.1093/ije/dyi185) shows that the hazard ratio for mortality from cardiovascular disease in men married to uneducated wives was 1.3 (95% confidence interval 1.1 to 1.5). The study involved more than 20 000 men and women aged 70 to 89 at baseline.

Contraceptive implant manufacturer will challenge court ruling: A court decision in the Netherlands that 15 women are entitled to damages after becoming pregnant while using the contraceptive implant Implanon is to be challenged by the manufacturer, the Netherlands based pharmaceutical company Organon, and by the women's doctors (*BMJ* 2005;330:1467).

Bush unveils mental health action plan

Jeanne Lenzer New York

President Bush has unveiled a federal action agenda for mental health in the United States, aimed at helping more patients to live in the community and removing some of the stigma of mental illness.

The agenda, which is based on the earlier recommendations of the New Freedom Commission on Mental Health (*BMJ* 2003;327:248), has been praised by a number of organisations, including the American Psychiatric Association and the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill. But critics say the agenda includes the promotion of unproven screening examinations and a controversial treatment algorithm, known as the Texas medication algorithm project (TMAP) (*BMJ* 2004;328:1458).

The federal plan is being coordinated by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, which is part of the Department of Health and Human Services in Rockville, Maryland.

Mark Weber, spokesman for the administration's Center for Mental Health Services, said that roughly \$24bn (£13bn; €20bn)



RON EDWARDS/AP

President George Bush signs the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act, designed to reduce youth suicide, in October 2004. His new mental health plan also makes reducing suicide a priority

would be made available annually for the reforms. The cash is not all new money but includes funds for existing projects, which will be brought into the federal plan.

One of the projects endorsed by the commission and incorporated into the plan is the TMAP. Mr Weber said the algorithm is a plan for best practice. But Stefan Kruszewski, a psychiatrist who exposed the overprescribing of psychotropic drugs to young people in state custody in Pennsylvania (*BMJ* 2004;329:69), criticised the federal action agenda for adopting the TMAP.

He said, "TMAP was market-

ed as a guide to safer and more effective [psychotropic] drugs than the cheaper, existing medications." But he said that the drugs promoted by the algorithm are neither safer nor more effective. "The newer atypical antipsychotics and SSRIs [selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors] have positive features, but these are often overshadowed by their negative effects, such as obesity, diabetes, and suicidality." PH

Details of the agenda are at www.samhsa.gov/Federalactionagenda/NFC_TOC.aspx.

Mental health plans are not being fully implemented in England

Andrew Cole London

Over half of all patients on the care programme approach—the process used by mental health services to document care—still don't have a written care plan or a phone number to call in an emergency, six years after the national service framework for mental health recommended that they should.

These findings come from a survey by the Healthcare Commission of 26 500 users of secondary services in 81 trusts in England. The commission, which monitors the quality of health care, also reports that a quarter of users of mental health services were not involved in

drawing up their care plan and that less than two thirds (58%) fully understood what was in their care plan.

More than three quarters of respondents were nevertheless happy with their overall care, and most had confidence in the doctors and other health professionals who treated them.

But almost half (46%) had had an appointment with a psychiatrist cancelled or changed in the past year and a quarter had seen at least two different psychiatrists in that time. Significantly, levels of satisfaction were much higher among those who had greater continuity of care.

Most users were taking drug treatment, but one in five felt they had no say in decisions about that treatment and more than a third had not been warned about side effects.

Although 80% of users of mental health services were unemployed, only half of those who wanted to go back to work were given support. A similar proportion reported getting no help in finding accommodation.

Among other findings from the survey were that:

- Only 40% of respondents had access to talking therapies;
- 53% didn't have a care review in the past year;
- A quarter of those sectioned said they did not have their rights explained to them.

Details of the survey can be found at www.healthcarecommission.org.uk.